

To: McClain-Vanderpool, Lisa[Mcclain-Vanderpool.Lisa@epa.gov]; Card, Joan[Card.Joan@epa.gov]; Faulk, Libby[Faulk.Libby@epa.gov]; McGrath, Shaun[McGrath.Shaun@epa.gov]
From: Smith, Paula
Sent: Fri 8/7/2015 5:40:12 PM
Subject: Fwd: News Clips: CO Mine Spill

Fyi

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Abrams, Dan" <Abrams.Dan@epa.gov>
Date: August 7, 2015 at 11:35:16 AM MDT
To: "Reynolds, Thomas" <Reynolds.Thomas@epa.gov>, "Purchia, Liz" <Purchia.Liz@epa.gov>, "Harrison, Melissa" <Harrison.Melissa@epa.gov>, "Lee, Monica" <Lee.Monica@epa.gov>, "Allen, Laura" <Allen.Laura@epa.gov>, "Davis, Jay" <Davis.Jay@epa.gov>, "Hull, George" <Hull.George@epa.gov>, "Valentine, Julia" <Valentine.Julia@epa.gov>, "Mylott, Richard" <Mylott.Richard@epa.gov>, "Smith, Paula" <Smith.Paula@epa.gov>
Cc: "Andreasen, Julia" <Andreasen.Julia@epa.gov>
Subject: RE: News Clips: CO Mine Spill

Pine River Times

<http://www.pinerivertimes.com/article/20150806/PRT01/150809920/-1/prt/EPA:-avoid-water-in-Animas-River-today->

EPA: Avoid water in Animas River Today

Times Staff

August 6 11:04AM

On Tuesday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety team working to investigate and address contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek. Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately 1 million gallons of water that was held behind unconsolidated

debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

The EPA recommends that recreational users of the Animas River avoid contact with or use of the river until the pulse of mine water passes.

The acidic mine water associated with the release contains high levels of sediment and metals. EPA teams are conducting sampling and visual observations today and will be monitoring river conditions over the next several days. The water associated with the release is obvious and highly discolored.

This mine waste water was sighted at Baker's Bridge (north of Durango) early this morning. It is estimated that it will arrive within the city limits of Durango by approximately 3 p.m.

La Plata County Office of Emergency Management, La Plata County Sheriff's Office, San Juan Basin Health Department and City of Durango have been monitoring the issue since yesterday. Local officials will be working to notify recreational users to avoid contact with the river until further notice. All agricultural water users have been notified to shut off water intake. It is recommended that pet owners keep their dogs and livestock out of the Animas River until further testing can be done to determine the content of the waste water.

Joe Lewendowski, Public Information Officer for Colorado Parks and Wildlife in Durango said, "Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologists are monitoring the impacts to the fish and other wildlife in the Animas River."

A call center has been set up for the public at 385-8700. As additional information is received, it will be posted to the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at www.sjbhd.org, La Plata County Government Facebook and San Juan Basin Health Department Facebook.

From: Abrams, Dan
Sent: Friday, August 07, 2015 1:33 PM
To: Reynolds, Thomas; Purchia, Liz; Harrison, Melissa; Lee, Monica; Allen, Laura; Davis, Jay; Hull, George; Valentine, Julia; Mylott, Richard; Smith, Paula
Cc: Andreasen, Julia
Subject: RE: News Clips: CO Mine Spill

ABC News Denver

<http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/local-news/1m-gal-of-contaminated-water-spilled-from-gold-king-mine-into-animas-river>

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Animas River closing following contaminated water spill from Gold King Mine

By Deb Stanley, Oscar Contreras

11:57 AM, Aug 6, 2015

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The Animas River is closing indefinitely following an accidental spill of more than one million gallons of contaminated water from the Gold King mine in southwestern Colorado, a La Plata County Sheriff told 7NEWS.

All watercraft including canoes, kayaks, tubes, rafts and other flotation devices from the north County line (San Juan County) to the South County line (Colorado/New Mexico state line) will not be allowed until further notice, La Plata County Sheriff Sean Smith said.

All watercraft within the location stated above must be removed, Smith added.

"This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultations with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute

Indian Tribe," said Smith.

Smith said in a statement that EPA test results are expected within the next 24 to 48 hours, at which point the order will be re-evaluated.

The acidic mine water was traveling down the Animas River and was expected to hit the city limits of Durango at approximately 3 p.m. on Thursday.

"The EPA and State Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety team working to investigate and address contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colo. unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek," according to a news release from the La Plata County Office of Emergency Management. "Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately 1 million gallons of water that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal."

County officials said while there were several workers at the mine at the time of the breach, no one was hurt.

However, they are asking that fishermen, rafters, boaters and other recreational users of the Animas River to avoid contact with the water until the mine water passes.

County officials said the acidic mine water contains high levels of sediment and metals.

"EPA teams are conducting sampling and visual observations today and will be monitoring river conditions over the next several days," county officials said. "The water associated with the release is obvious and highly discolored."

San Juan Corp., property owner of the Golden King Mine released the following statement:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, operating under an access agreement obtained from the owner of the Gold King Mine, had begun an investigation regarding the source of contaminated water at the Gold King Mine last year. Upon suspending work last year, the USEPA backfilled the portal to the mine. On August 5th, 2015, while the USEPA was removing the backfill from the portal to the Gold King Mine to continue its investigation this year, the plug blew out releasing contaminated water behind the backfill into the Animas River.

Residents with questions about the water may call 970-385-8700.

The Gold King Mine is just outside Silverton. The mine started operations in 1887. According to NarrowGauge.org, the Gold King shipped more than \$8 million in ore during its operations.

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Associated Press (Via Local 9 NBC News Colorado)

<http://www.9news.com/story/news/local/2015/08/06/silverton-mine-plug/31218753/>

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Animas River contamination could lead to water restrictions

Mallory E Davis and Jonathan Gonzalez, 9:59 p.m. MDT August 6, 2015

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SILVERTON (AP) - The La Plata County Sheriff's office closed the Animas River to all watercraft Thursday afternoon after it was contaminated with about a million gallons of mine waste that turned it orange.

The river is closed to watercraft including canoes, kayaks, tubes, rafts and other flotation devices from the Northern San Juan County line to the southern County line at the Colorado/New Mexico State line until further notice. All such watercraft must be removed from the Animas River within those locations.

The order will remain in effect until it is determined that the river is safe. EPA test results of the Animas River are expected within 24-48 hours, and the order will be re-evaluated at that time.

An Environmental Protection Agency and State Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety team are working to investigate the contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water.

The EPA says about one million gallons of mine waste, containing high levels of sediment and metals, spewed into Cement Creek, which runs into the Animas.

Several workers on-site at the time were unharmed.

Radio Durango reports that the city has shut down water intakes until the contaminated water has passed.

San Juan Corp., who owns the Gold King Mine, issued the following statement about the situation late Thursday afternoon.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, operating under an access agreement obtained from the owner of the Gold King Mine, had begun an investigation regarding the source of contaminated water at the Gold King Mine last year. Upon suspending work last year, the USEPA backfilled the portal to the mine. On August 5th, 2015, while the USEPA was removing the backfill from the portal to the Gold King Mine to continue its investigation this year, the plug blew out releasing contaminated water behind the backfill into the Animas River.

The mine spill flooded several San Juan county roads Wednesday. No other injuries have been reported.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment says that there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed because of longstanding water quality impairment.

However, there are two types of trout in the Animas -- brown and rainbow. The Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife is putting some trout in cages in the river to monitor how the fish respond to the water.

"The metals will cause a spike in the PH balance of the water, making the water likely more acidic -- it's quite likely fish will be killed," said Colorado Parks and Wildlife official Joe Lewandowski.

While drinking water is not affected by the contaminants, the drinking water supply could be impacted if water cannot be pulled from the Animas.

"There's only so much the city can pull from the Florida and it's not enough to meet the daily demands of the residents," said Amy Maestas, editor of The Durango Herald. "It's still wait-and-see. People are concerned that this may lead to mandatory restrictions. It's the height of summer and it's when we use the most water."

A call center has been set up for the public at 970-385-8700. As additional information is received, it will be posted to the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at www.sjbhd.org, La Plata County Government Facebook and San Juan Basin Health Department Facebook.

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The Durango Herald

<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20150806/NEWS01/150809765/Mine-waste-in-Animas-River-nears-Durango->

Catastrophe on the Animas

By Chase Olivarius-Mcallister , Mary Shinn and Shane Benjamin Herald staff writers

August 6 11:24PM

Acidic wastewater from an abandoned mine above Silverton coursed its way through La Plata County on Thursday, turning the Animas River orange-brown, forcing the city of Durango to stop pumping raw water from the river and persuading the sheriff to close the river to public use.

Residents lined the banks of the Animas River on Thursday afternoon to watch the toxic wastewater as it flowed through Durango city limits. But the sludge slowed as it snaked its way through the oxbow in the Animas Valley, and the murk didn't arrive until after 8 p.m.

The accident occurred about 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County. A mining and safety team working on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency triggered the discharge, according to a news release issued by the EPA.

The EPA's team was working with heavy equipment to secure and consolidate a safe way to enter the mine and access contaminated water, said Richard Mylott, a spokesman for the EPA in Denver. The project was intended to pump and treat the water and reduce metal pollution flowing out of the mine into Cement Creek, he said.

The disaster released about 1 million gallons of acidic water containing sediment and metals flowing as an orange-colored discharge downstream through Cement Creek and into the Animas River.

River closure

The Animas River was closed to tubers, rafters and kayakers Thursday as the toxic plume made its way through Durango. The closure went into effect at 3 p.m., and it will remain in effect indefinitely until the river is deemed safe, said La Plata County Sheriff Sean Smith. Government officials aren't certain what toxins and at what levels toxins are present in the river, and, therefore, decided it was best to close the river to public use.

The closure, which applies to all flotation devices, is in effect for the entire stretch of the Animas River in La Plata County.

“This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe,” Smith said. “EPA test results of the Animas River are expected within 24-48 hours, and the order will be re-evaluated at that time.”

City to conserve water

The city of Durango stopped pumping water out of the Animas River on Wednesday to prevent contaminating the city reservoir.

The Animas is an important secondary source of water for the city during the summer, and residents need to conserve as much water as possible over the next few days until the water is safe to use, said Steve Salka, the city's utilities director.

No formal water restrictions were issued.

At south City Market, Sean Lumen, who was hoisting bottled water onto emptied shelves, said if customers continued to buy water at Thursday's rate, the store would run out sometime Friday.

At Albertsons, front-end manager Shelley Osborn said she initially thought people were buying up bottled water at an unusually rapid rate because it was on sale. Aaron Memro, grocery manager, estimated Albertsons sold two pallets of water Thursday – far more than usual.

During the emergency, Salka will not send raw water to Hillcrest Golf Club or Fort Lewis College for grounds use. The city also will not water any city-owned parks for the next three days to help conserve, he said.

On hot summer days, the city can use up to 9.2 million gallons a day. But the city can pump only 5.3 million gallons a day out of the Florida River.

The city reservoir was about 4.5 feet below capacity on Wednesday, Salka said.

“This couldn't happen at a worse time for me, so I have to be really cautious,” he said.

Fish habitat

The EPA downplayed the potential effects on aquatic life, saying there are long-standing water-quality impairment issues associated with heavy metals in Cement Creek and upper portions of the Animas River. As a result, there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed, and fish populations have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton in the Animas River, the release said.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife placed four cages containing fish in the Animas River to monitor what happens to them, said spokesman Joe Lewandowski. The cages were placed at

32nd Street, the fish hatchery, Dallabetta Park and the High Bridge.

“We'll see if those fish survive,” Lewandowski said. “We're also monitoring to make sure we don't get infiltration into the hatchery, because that could be a problem.”

Peter Butler, co-coordinator of the Animas River Stakeholders Group and former chairman of the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission, said it remains to be seen whether the toxic metal concentrations flowing downriver will impact the few fish species living below Bakers Bridge. But if the plume does have a negative impact on aquatic life, Butler estimated that fish would die within hours of contact with the plume.

The contaminated water made its way to Bakers Bridge in La Plata County by Thursday morning and hit town by Thursday evening. The material was expected to cross the New Mexico state line between 4 and 5 a.m. Friday and arrive in Farmington on Friday evening.

Farmington city officials shut down all water-supply intake pumps to avoid contamination and advised citizens to stay out of the river until the discoloration has passed.

Local officials asked all agricultural water users to shut off water intakes.

What's in the water?

Butler said the water being discharged from Gold King carried high concentrations of iron, aluminum, cadmium, zinc and copper.

While he didn't know precisely the metal levels in the water that surged out of Gold King on Wednesday, Butler said: “I'm sure they were really high.”

Though Gold King has no record of emitting mercury, Butler said “when old mines open up like that, mercury sometimes drains out. Possibly, some other metals might have been released, like lead and arsenic. But there's no evidence of that at this point.”

Butler said Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety scientist Kirstin Brown had tested pH levels – the telltale measure of acidity in water – in the Animas River at Trimble Lane when the toxic plume arrived.

The pH level dropped from 7.8 to 5.8.

“That's a pretty big drop,” Butler said.

Silverton does not use water from Cement Creek, so its water source remained uncontaminated, said William Tookey, the San Juan County administrator who met Thursday with EPA officials.

The Animas River was looking healthier about 24 hours after the discharge in Silverton, he said.

Gold King problems

This is not the first time there has been a water-related accident at one of the mines, but it did come as a surprise to the town, Tookey said.

He was not sure if the release would change attitudes toward the EPA in town. For years, some town residents and local officials have been opposed to a Superfund listing.

“Since it was the EPA that was responsible for this, it may make people less likely to be

open to them,” he said.

Butler said everyone invested in improving the Animas River's water quality wanted to get into Gold King, because, for years, it has been one of the two biggest contributors of heavy-metal loads in the Animas Basin.

“They had a plan for handling the mine pool, but something went wrong, and it all came blowing out,” Butler said.

EPA teams will be sampling and investigating downstream locations over the next several days to confirm the release has passed and poses no additional concerns for aquatic life or water users.

“This unfortunate incident underscores the very reason EPA and the state of Colorado are focused on addressing the environmental risks at abandoned mine sites,” said David Ostrander, director of EPA's emergency-response program in Denver. “We are thankful that the personnel working on this mine cleanup project were unharmed. EPA will be assessing downstream conditions to ensure any impacts and concerns are addressed, as necessary.”

From: Abrams, Dan

Sent: Friday, August 07, 2015 11:06 AM

To: Reynolds, Thomas; Purchia, Liz; Harrison, Melissa; Lee, Monica; Allen, Laura; Davis, Jay; Hull, George; Valentine, Julia; Mylott, Richard; Smith, Paula

Cc: Andreasen, Julia

Subject: News Clips: CO Mine Spill

August 7

Associated Press (Via ABC News)

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Sludge From Colorado Mine Spill Heads Down River to NM

By Kristen Wyatt 3:42AM ET

A plume of orange-ish muck from million-gallon mine waste spill in Colorado was headed down river to New Mexico, prompting communities along the water route to take precautions until the sludge passes.

Officials emphasized that there was no threat to drinking water from the spill. But downstream water agencies were warned to avoid Animas River water until the plume passes, said David Ostrander, director of the EPA's emergency response program in Denver.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said that a cleanup team was working with heavy equipment Wednesday to secure an entrance to the Gold King Mine in southwest Colorado. Workers instead released an estimated 1 million gallons of mine waste into Cement Creek.

"The project was intended to pump and treat the water and reduce metals pollution flowing out of the mine," agency spokesman Rich Mylott said in a statement.

The creek runs into the Animas, which then flows into the San Juan River in New Mexico and joins the Colorado River in Utah.

Officials weren't sure how long it would take the plume to dissipate, Ostrander said. The acidic sludge is made of heavy metal and soil, which could irritate the skin, he said.

The EPA was testing the plume to see which metals were released. Previous contamination from the mine sent iron, aluminum, cadmium, zinc and copper into the water, said Peter

Butler, co-coordinator of the Animas River Stakeholders Group.

Earlier Thursday, the EPA said in a statement that the polluted water "was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal."

As the plume headed toward New Mexico, that state's governor said the EPA waited too long to tell her about the problem.

Gov. Susana Martinez is disturbed by the lack of information provided by the agency to New Mexico's environmental agencies, said Chris Sanchez, a spokesman for the governor. Sanchez said that the state was not told of the spill until almost a full day after it happened.

The plume made its way to Durango on Thursday afternoon, prompting La Plata County health officials to warn rafters and others to avoid the water. The scenic waterway was the backdrop for parts of the movie "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" and is popular with summer boaters.

Durango stopped pumping water out of the Animas River on Wednesday to make sure none of the waste could be sucked up into the city reservoir. It also suspended the transfers of raw water to a local golf course and Fort Lewis College. Pet owners were advised to keep dogs and livestock out of the Animas.

"It's really, really ugly," Butch Knowlton, La Plata County's director of emergency preparedness, told The Durango Herald. "Any kind of recreational activity on the river needs to be suspended."

In Farmington, New Mexico, city officials shut down water-supply intake pumps to avoid contamination and advised citizens to stay out of the river until the discoloration has passed. Don Cooper, emergency manager in San Juan County, said people should not panic because the EPA had told the county the spill would not harm people and that the primary pollutants were iron and zinc.

"It's not going to look pretty, but it's not a killer," Cooper told The (Farmington) Daily Times.

The impact on wildlife wasn't clear. There are no fish in the Cement Creek watershed because of longstanding problems with water quality, the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment said.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife was placing cages containing fish in the Animas River to monitor what happens to them, spokesman Joe Lewandowski said.

"We'll see if those fish survive," Lewandowski said. "We're also monitoring to make sure we don't get infiltration into the hatchery, because that could be a problem."

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife office in suburban Denver did not immediately return a call asking about the spill.

Durango resident Lisa Shaefer said she was near the mine Wednesday when a mine bulwark broke and sent a torrent of water downstream that raised the water level 2 to 3 feet in Cement Creek. The initial wall of water carried rocks and debris and made a roar as it pushed through a culvert, she said.

"What came down was the filthiest yellow mustard water you've ever seen," she told the newspaper.

AUGUST 6

The Denver Post

http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_28597473/san-juan-county-spill-highlights-years-colorado-cleanup

San Juan County spill highlights years of Colorado cleanup effort

By Jesse Paul and Bruce Finley August 6 4:23 PM MDT

Environmental officials have been working for years to clear toxic metals and acidic water from Colorado's roughly 22,000 abandoned mines.

The difficulty of that effort was clear Wednesday when the Environmental Protection Agency accidentally released a 1 million-gallon flow of wastewater into a watershed targeted over the past several decades for cleanup.

The Bureau of Land Management had even highlighted the Animas River as one of three environmental priority areas in Colorado affected by mine waste.

The Gold King Mine, the source of the spill, has been eyed for cleanup by environmentalists and federal and state officials since at least 2005.

The EPA was at the site Wednesday with heavy machinery when the spill occurred.

The mine's owners say a plug failed.

"The great news is that modern mining does not allow the release of these waters," said Elizabeth Holley, assistant professor of mining engineering at the Colorado School of Mines. "The bad news is we owe our statehood to mining prior to any environmental regulations."

Until 1977, mining laws in Colorado were minimal, said Ginny Brannon, director of the Colorado Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety.

"Folks could go out and do what they want and walk away from the sites, and this is one of them," Brannon said Thursday. "The main concern from my perspective is continuing to restore and safeguard these old turn-of-the-century mines so that public health and safety and wildlife are protected."

Scientists say Colorado's mineral-rich mountains were shedding toxic metals and acids long before prospectors began digging for profit, but mining can speed up that process.

Holley said Cement Creek, where the Gold King spill happened, was deemed undrinkable in 1876, long before mining had become widespread in the area.

"This is sort of a punctuated release of water, which is unfortunate," Holley said. "But this watershed has had major acid rock drainage for a century."

Jesse Paul: 303-954-1733, jpaul@denverpost.com or twitter.com/JesseAPaul

The Denver Post

http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_28595759/animas-river-contaminated-by-1-million-gallons-contaminated

Animas River fouled by 1 million gallons of contaminated mine water

By Jesse Paul and Bruce Finley August 6 11:27AM MDT

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DURANGO — A spill that sent 1 million gallons of wastewater from an abandoned mine into the Animas River, turning the river orange, set off warnings Thursday that contaminants threaten water quality for those downstream.

The Environmental Protection Agency confirmed it triggered the spill while using heavy machinery to investigate pollutants at the Gold King Mine, north of Silverton.

Health and environmental officials are evaluating the river as it flows through San Juan and La Plata counties. They said the wastewater contained zinc, iron, copper and other heavy metals, prompting the EPA to warn agricultural users to shut off water intakes along the river and law officials to close the river to recreational users.

"There's nothing that can be done to stop the flow of the river," said Joe Lewandowski, a spokesman for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. "We can only wait until the flows slow down. We had a big heavy spring (of rain) here."

Lewandowski said the EPA is testing to determine the river's metal levels and results should be returned by mid-Friday.

Downstream in Durango, hundreds of people gathered along the Animas River to watch as the blue waters turned a thick, radiant orange and yellow just after 8 p.m., nearly 34 hours after the spill started.

"It is a sad day. The fish could be gone," said Daniel Silva, 37, who was fishing near Durango as he does every day after work. "I am safety-orientated. Working in the oil fields, we take measures every day to prevent leakage. Why didn't they? If this kills the fish, what do we do?"

After people told him the contamination was coming, he stopped fishing, and his daughter, who was swimming, got out of the water. And they waited on a bridge.

City officials asked residents to cut back on their water use, and irrigation of city land at Fort Lewis College was stopped.

The La Plata County Sheriff's Office has closed the river from the San Juan County line — including Durango — to New Mexico. Authorities say they will re-evaluate the closure once the EPA tests are confirmed.

The spill was triggered at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at the mine on the upper portions of Cement Creek, about 55 miles north of Durango. The fluid was being held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal, the EPA says. The agency called the release "unexpected."

Deputy Stephen Lowrance of the San Juan County Sheriff's Office said authorities are keeping people away from the Animas. In Silverton, signs have been posted warning of the danger, and the sheriff's office sent out a public health advisory to stay away from Cement Creek and the Animas River.

"The river looks pretty nasty," Lowrance said. "It doesn't look like water; it just looks like sludge."

The mine is owned by Golden-based San Juan Corp., Durango attorney Nancy Agro said Thursday afternoon. She said the EPA had been operating at the site for years under an access agreement.

"Upon suspending work last year, the EPA backfilled the portal to the mine," Agro said in a statement. "On (Wednesday), while the EPA was removing the backfill from the portal to the Gold King Mine to continue its investigation this year, the plug blew out, releasing contaminated water behind the backfill."

At the time of the spill, EPA responders were at the scene evaluating the toxic materials already leaking into Cement Creek.

"There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach. All were unharmed," the San Juan Basin Health Department said in a news release. "The EPA recommends that recreational users of the Animas River avoid contact with or use of the river until the pulse of mine water passes."

Pet owners have been told to keep their dogs and livestock out of the Animas River until testing is done.

Steve Salka, utilities manager for the city of Durango, said he pulls water from the Animas in the summer to help replenish the Terminal Reservoir. He said that although the city's main water source is the Florida River, the contamination could cause serious problems.

"I want to know what's in it," he said Thursday. "The most important thing is what's in it. I need to know.

"Back in the 1800s, things were used in mining that aren't allowed anymore."

The Animas is a 126-mile river that flows into the San Juan River in Farmington, N.M. The San Juan eventually spills into the Colorado River in Utah.

Todd Hartman, spokesman for the state's Department of Natural Resources, says the mine operated more than a century ago. It was permitted again in 1986 but never produced in the modern era, he said.

"Its permit was revoked in 2005," he said.

Bill Simon, one of coordinators for the Animas River Stakeholders Group, a water-quality collaborative, said the Gold King Mine was one of several abandoned sites in the area they have been monitoring for decades.

"I think the EPA may have misinterpreted what was going on," Simon said.

Simon said iron oxide in the spill is his biggest concern, especially since it can clog the gills of fish and large invertebrates.

"This river system is somewhat used to pretty poor water quality anyway, so it remains to be seen what effect it's going to be on aquatic life," he said.

The EPA agrees and says because of long-standing water-quality impairment associated with heavy metals in Cement Creek, there are no fish populations. Further, federal officials say, the Animas River historically has been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton.

It's unknown whether the spill could have any human health impacts, officials say.

"We are monitoring the situation very closely and working with the EPA to get testing results to make sure we minimize any health impacts," said Flannery O'Neil, spokeswoman for the area's health department.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife says it is monitoring wildlife health in the area.

The agency has placed cages with fish in the river to see how they react to the waters. Officials say they should know Friday whether there were any effects.

"This is a significant spill," said Elizabeth Holley, an assistant professor of mining engineering at the Colorado Schools of Mines.

Staff writer Yesenia Robles contributed to this report.

KOAT Albuquerque

<http://www.koat.com/news/farmington-protecting-water-after-dam-breach/34575358>

Orange, sediment-filled water heads to Farmington

August 6 9:49PM MDT

FARMINGTON, N.M. —The Gold King Mine, located above Silverton, Colorado, experienced a breach in their contamination dam Thursday, triggering a large release of water containing sediment.

More than a million gallons of the acidic, orange water filled with iron and other metals will make its way down the Animas River and will be in the Farmington area by tomorrow morning. It'll take at least 24 hours for it to pass through, forcing many people to cancel their plans.

"We were going to go inner tubing but now we can't because we don't want to go in the contaminated water," said Joanna Vahey, who is visiting from Seattle.

Officials don't want anyone going in, either. People and pets are being asked to stay away from the river until the plume passes.

"I'm scared for my dog because I enjoy walking the park and I'm always leading him to the river so he can drink water," said Sylvia Garcia, who walks her dog by the river daily.

Right now the city has shut down all of the intake pumps to prevent contamination. But, officials want to assure people in the area that this will not affect drinking water.

They'll also let more water out of the Navajo Reservoir to dilute the contamination.

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish was not aware of this environmental hazard until Action 7 News began asking questions about safety. They tell us they will watch and document what happens to the fish in the river.

"(Gov. Susana Martinez) is very concerned by the massive waste spill ... that (Environmental Protection Agency) officials have admitted to causing. (She) has ordered her agencies to work with local and federal officials to ensure the health and safety of New Mexicans is protected," said Chris Sanchez, a spokesman with Martinez's office. "(She) is disturbed by the lack of information provided by the EPA to our environmental agencies in New Mexico and strongly believes that people in our communities downstream deserve to have all the information about this situation."

KOB

<http://www.kob.com/article/stories/s3872346.shtml#.VcTI6flViko>

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Animas River closed to public after EPA dumps 1M gallons of waste

By Danielle Todesco KOB eyewitness News 4

SILVERTON, Colo. - A mine waste spill has spewed about a million gallons of orange-

colored discharge into a tributary of the Animas River.

The Environmental Protection Agency said it triggered the release while using heavy machinery to investigate pollutants at the Gold King Mine north of Silverton.

The La Plata County Sheriff's Office has closed the river to the public.

"This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe," advised Sheriff Sean Smith. "This Order shall remain in effect until it is determined that the river is safe. EPA test results of the Animas River are expected within 24-48 hours, and the Order will be re-evaluated at that time."

Environmental authorities are scrambling to assess damage from the leak, caused when a plug blew at the Gold King Mine near Silverton. Earlier today, officials say that drinking water is not affected and that the spill is not harmful to humans. The primary pollutants are iron and zinc.

The EPA says that about 1 million gallons of mine waste spewed into Cement Creek, which feeds the Animas.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment says that there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed because of longstanding water quality impairment.

The Bureau of Reclamation will release more water from the Navajo Dam in order to dilute the merger from the Animas into the San Juan River in Farmington, NM.

City of Farmington officials are urging residents to stay out of the river and to keep live stock from drinking the water if discoloration is present.

Farmington's drinking water is unaffected, city officials said.

The New Mexico Governor's office criticized how the EPA released information about the spill. In fact, her office learned about the spill from the Southern Ute Tribe, according to the governor's spokesperson Chris Sanchez.

"The Governor is disturbed by the lack of information provided by the EPA to our environmental agencies in New Mexico and strongly believes that people in our communities downstream deserve to have all the information about this situation," Sanchez said in a statement.

Time Magazine

<http://time.com/3987958/mine-spiller-yellow-river-colorado/>

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A Massive Waste Spill Turned This River in Colorado Orange

By Maya Rhodan August 6

The EPA accidentally caused the spill, reports say

About 1 million gallons of mine waste spilled into a Colorado waterway on Wednesday, turning the water bright orange and prompting officials to warn residents to avoid recreational use of the Animas River.

San Juan County health officials say the Environmental Protection Agency and the state Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety were investigating another contamination when they “unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek.” Cement Creek is a tributary of the Animas River.

Residents in parts of Colorado have been urged to cut back on water use and avoid the Animas River until officials are sure the river is free from contamination. According to a release by San Juan County Health Department, the waste contains “high levels of sediment and metals.”

Residents in Durango, Colo. were bracing for the contaminated spillage to reach their area on Thursday afternoon. According to the Durango Herald, the city has stopped watering local parks for at least three days and is urging residents to conserve water until they’re sure their supply isn’t contaminated. The city has also ceased pumping water to a local college and golf course.

Dan Abrams

Special Assistant to the Associate Administrator for Public Affairs

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Office: (202) 564-2507 Mobile: (202) 768-5811

1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20460